Good Friday through a mother’s eyes March 30, 2018

Good Friday

Here we are again for “Good Friday” service. As a youngster and even now, I thought it to be an odd name for this day. Although I understand the theological implications of the day being good, it is still a strange way to identify such a painful loss for a mother never mind for the world. What we remember about this day was not good, but tragic, brutal, a day filled with injustice. How could this day be referred to as “good”? So, this evening, I want to talk about Good Friday through the eyes of a mother. In recalling some of Jesus’ final words we here these words:  When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple whom he loved standing beside her, he said to his mother, "Woman, here is your son." Then he said to the disciple, "Here is your mother."

When I was a kid we would find many ways to entertain ourselves. The computer wasn’t an affordable option back then and what you could do with them now surely wasn’t going to be done on a Tandy. I mention this because I want to tell the you a story about pain through a mother’s eyes. Back in the day, in our neighborhood, one our favorite games was Rock War. In the back of our homes usually was an ally way for the sanitation trucks to come through to pick up the garbage. On the days after the garbage cans had been emptied, the boys would line the cans up horizontally across from each other with about thirty to forty feet between the sides. The cans served as a fortress for each side. The lids for the cans became shields. The boys would collect rocks to stack up for ammunition. Once everything was in place, including each team safely hidden behind their fortress the firing of rocks would commence. The winner would be the last team standing with ammunition and had scored the most hits on the lids. You could count them by the sounds the rocks would make as they connected. The aim was never to hit one another. This war could last till sundown if there were plenty of rocks available. At one particular war, an older boy decided he couldn’t allow the little children to play by themselves and he joined the war. Being able to throw a much bigger rock much harder than the others, he hurled what seemed like a missile towards the other side. Unfortunately, it struck a boy in the face. Suddenly this kid’s face had become a faucet spewing blood everywhere. At the same time the injury was occurring, the injured boy’s mother was just getting off from work and walking home from the bus stop unknowing the commotion she was witnessing was surrounding her son. This boy’s mother was known in the neighborhood as a squeamish individual. At neighborhood block parties all the kids knew she could be pranked and scared silly if she saw anything that looked like an injury or blood. But here is the beauty of a mother’s love for her son. When she realized it was her son, she became fearless. Picking him up and walking towards the hospital that was a good ten blocks away she showed no fear. Her once bright white starched uniformed immaculately pressed was now crimson, blood ran down her white stockings into her once white nursing shoes. Effortlessly, she walked hastily onward. It appeared she was praying as she walked. The majority of us followed behind like we were soldiers protecting our own. A good Samaritan noticing what was happening took the small boy from the mother and placed him in the back seat of his car. With him and his mother in tow, he raced them to the hospital.

The point to this story is, just as this mother, refused to give up on her injured son so did Jesus’ mother. She was there for his humble beginning in a manger and she was there for his suffering and death. She saw him breathe his first breath and witnessed him taking his last. Can we even begin to imagine the anguish she must have felt? With every strike when he was flogged her heart was pierced. With every fall she remembered when he was young and would fall she was there to help him up. When he scraped his knees and bumped his head she was there to take the pain away. What anger and disgust she must have felt for soldiers that nailed his hands and his feet to the olive tree. She remembered when he thirst as a child she was there to give him a drink.

But now, the only communication between her and her son was the love in their eyes for each other and the belief that she would see him again. It had to be that belief that allowed her to accept her son’s final act of humanly protection of commending her to another’s care. It amazes me that while Jesus was in the midst of such enormous pain, he could think of the needs and pain of others. His mother must have been very proud of her son’s ability to show such compassion.

Jesus’ most powerful sermon came from the cross. He was still compassionately thinking of others even when hanging on the cross. The first three statements from the cross reveal an enormous and incredible love for others. In all three statements, Jesus was thinking of others. Jesus said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” and in this statement Jesus was focusing on the needs of the soldiers and crowds who were ridiculing him and not on his own pain. In the second statement, Jesus was focusing on the thief on the cross when he said to the thief, “Today, you will be with me in paradise.” And the same quality of love for another is found in the third statement when Jesus was concentrating on the needs of his mother and best friend. He simply said to his mother. “Here is your son.”  He said to his best friend, “Here is your mother.” Jesus was telling the both of them: Take care of one another in the future when I am physically gone from you. For his mother, a flood gate of memories opened.

No doubt her mind shifted back to when the angel Gabriel came and told her that she would get pregnant by the Holy Spirit and give birth to the savior of the world. And what was young Mary’s reaction? “With God, nothing is impossible. I am a servant of the Lord. I believe.” And so, we are reminded that Mary was a devout young Jewish woman who deeply believed in God, that nothing was impossible with God, even that she could become pregnant by the Holy Spirit. I personally believe that she was the first human being on earth who believed in Jesus as the Son of God.

And then she remembered when she was in the temple, dedicating Jesus to God, and an old man by the name of Simeon came up to her, “a sword will pierce your soul and the hearts of many people will be revealed.” Mary pondered these things. She always would have thought: “what does it mean that a sword will pierce my heart?” Like so many things deeply buried in the recesses of her mind, she remembered the warning by the old man Simeon that a sword would pierce her heart before it was all over. This was the first sign, an omen, to her that her son would die a murderous death, but I do not believe that she fully grasped what this meant.

If there was a moment to smile on this day it probably was when Mary was with Jesus when he was in the temple at age twelve and he said, “I must be about my Father’s business. I must be in my Father’s house.”  The Bible said that she pondered and remembered these things, that Jesus knew that his real father was not Joseph but the Holy Spirit.

With the flood gate of memories still washing over her, Mary remembered she was with Jesus when Jesus did his first miracle, turning the water into wine at a wedding feast. Mary seemed to push Jesus into his first miracle, and he seemed hesitant. It seems, by reading this story in John 2, that Mary had a glimmer of Jesus’ true identity. After this miracle, the disciples first believed in him; and the disciples and Mary went down together with Jesus to a little town of Capernaum. I am simply suggesting to you that according to John 2 and the water into wine, Mary believed in Jesus even before the disciples.

While Mary was with Jesus at the foot of the cross she realized his time was fleeing. This would have been the most awful and gut-wrenching experience of her life, to see and experience his crucifixion on the cross. The nails that were sent through his wrists could have just as well gone through her wrists. The sword that pieced his side could have just as well been thrust through her side. Jesus’ pain was her pain. That is the way it is with mothers. I have known and watched many mothers during my life as an educator and deacon, and I have watched such mothers when their children are deathly sick, in trouble and suffering. It is always the same: the mother totally feels the pain of her child, and Mary totally felt the excruciating pain of Jesus. … Mary’s best friends and sister were there with her, but their love and compassion did not diminish the sadness and agony she was feeling. Her friends and sisters shared her grief, but her grief was not diminished.

So, for me, Mary is a model of mothering for all of us. Every child needs a great mother. There is no other occupation in the world that compares to quality mothering from birth to death. I personally have such a great mother, and I sometimes believe the greatest human gift that God ever gave to me is a fine mother. You see, in the story I told you earlier about the courageous mother who began to walk with her son was my mother. Because of her love and compassion to act although we did not have a car, saved my brother’s life and sight. Today that scrawny little kid is now a minister with a few scrawny kids of his own. As the book of Proverbs says, a fine mother is more valuable than jewels. If we are to see the good in today let us start with acknowledging the love of Mary for our savior in spite of the pain she endured so long ago on Calvary. I pray that we to can love him so selflessly for all he has done for us.